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SUBJECT: GHANA RECORDS FIRST H1N1 CASES

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1. SUMMARY: Ghana has recorded six confirmed cases of H1N1 influenza through August 20, 2009. Two individuals were treated in hospital with Tamiflu and have fully recovered, and four persons are currently being treated at home with Tamiflu and have not yet recovered. To date, Ghana has not recorded any H1N1 fatalities. USG agencies at post, including the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit (NAMRU), USAID and CDC have been collaborating with GOG health officials as they respond to the pandemic. END SUMMARY.

FIRST TWO H1N1 PATIENTS RECOVER

2. On August 6, Ghana confirmed its first two cases of H1N1 through lab testing at the University of Ghana's Noguchi Memorial Institute for Medical Research, which serves as Ghana's central reference laboratory for influenza and other diseases. The first two cases involved a brother who had recently returned from the United Kingdom and his sister. Both were hospitalized and treated with Tamiflu at an Accra hospital, and were subsequently released from the hospital after making a full recovery. The Ghana Health Service (GHS), the division of the Ministry of Health (MOH) that manages Ghana's public health and hospital system, traced contacts of the individuals, but did not detect any further H1N1 cases through lab testing.

FOUR NEW H1N1 CASES IN TREATMENT

3. On August 18, two new cases of H1N1 were confirmed through lab testing at Noguchi. An expatriate father and his child living in the Accra Airport Residential Area recently returned from overseas travel and appeared at a health clinic in Accra on August 18 with fever and cough. Samples were tested at Noguchi that same day and confirmed the presence of the H1N1 flu virus. On August 19, the expatriate mother and a second child in the family also tested positive for H1N1.

4. All four individuals are currently being treated at home with Tamiflu. The GHS is currently identifying and tracing others with whom the family may have come in contact. Contacts at the GHS would not reveal to us the nationalities of the expatriates, but confirmed to us that they were not American or Ghanaian.

5. The four newly recorded H1N1 cases are not related to or linked to the first two cases. To date, there have been no confirmed fatalities from H1N1 in Ghana. Through August 20, the Noguchi Lab has tested over 70 samples for the presence of H1N1, and only six samples have tested positive for H1N1.

16. Embassy USAID and EST officers attended H1N1 technical coordination meetings at the MOH on August 12 and August 19, where MOH officials shared with us their actions in response to the first H1N1 cases. The GHS and MOH have distributed 50,000 units of Tamiflu to regional hospitals and health clinics, and sent guidelines to both public and private health facilities about the procedures that should be followed in cases of suspected H1N1 influenza. The GHS and MOH are currently preparing public service announcements (i.e., radio spots, posters, and specific announcements at the Accra International Airport) and guidelines for schools about dealing with H1N1.

17. At the technical coordination meeting on August 19, GHS Director General Dr. E.K. Sory said that the GOG may call on its international partners for additional assistance as the GOG continues to respond to the pandemic. For instance, GOG health officials noted that they may need assistance going forward in preparing messages to schools, in procuring personal protection equipment (PPE) for health care workers after existing stocks run out, and in procuring additional reagents, primers and chemicals from abroad for continued lab testing at Noguchi. However, GOG officials have not yet made any specific requests, other than continued coordination and communication with international partners such as the WHO, UNICEF and the Red Cross, and USG agencies, including NAMRU, CDC and USAID.

COMMENT

18. USG support and technical assistance helped in the detection of Ghana's first H1N1 cases. NAMRU has a strong collaborative relationship with the Noguchi Lab and currently funds one active

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duty physician and 10 lab specialists and staff at Noguchi, and also provides the reagents, chemicals and training on the real-time PCR machines at Noguchi. CDC has also been providing Noguchi with H1N1 primers to test human biological samples for the presence of H1N1. In addition, USAID has been working with the GOG, International Federation of the Red Cross and the Ghana Red Cross Society in preparing a comprehensive pandemic preparedness and humanitarian response plan for Ghana through USAID's H2P Initiative. We will continue to work closely with the GHS, MOH, Noguchi and other partners as the GOG responds to the growing threat of H1N1.

19. The Embassy's working group on avian and pandemic influenza will meet on August 25 to consider what other steps the mission, embassy community and American citizens may need to take in pandemic preparedness.

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